

Oyster action LIFE'S CUSTOMS

Duxbury Beach hosts Island Creek festival

By GateHouse News Service

It's not every day a person gets to eat 24 of the world's most sought-after oysters, but for Judy Hamilton of Abington, the delicacy was not just a tasty treat, it was a competition.

For the second straight year, Hamilton was the winner of the "Oyster Slurp" contest at the Island Creek Oyster Festival Sept. 20.

"I was nervous, but I knew I could do it," she said. "I was raised on oysters."

The winner gets an all-expense-paid trip to Chicago for a national competition, but after her 2007 win, Hamilton was unable to go.

"My sister lives in Chicago, so I'm really excited to be able to go visit her and compete this year," she said.

Saturday was the third annual festival, but it was the first time the event was held at Duxbury Beach. It was an appropriate place, considering each of the 120,000 oysters that Island Creek farmers ship across the continent every week come from Duxbury Bay.

Those same farmers harvested more than 30,000 sweet oysters Sept. 19 so they would be fresh for the festival. Hundreds of volunteer shuckers worked to serve the 1,200 guests under the giant white tent set up next to Blakeman's restaurant at Duxbury Beach Park.

Shore Gregory, Island Creek's director of business development, said the company hoped to raise at least \$60,000 to donate to local nonprofit organizations, including Crossroads for Kids, Duxbury Bay Maritime School and the Duxbury Beach Reservation.

"It's a great way to give back to these organizations, because it's really about them," Gregory said.

Bob Zapolski of Newburyport, who volunteered to be a shucker for the day, said he was opening approximately 15 dozen oysters per hour.

"I've had oysters on the East Coast, on the West Coast, in Ireland, Sweden and France, and I still think Island Creek's oysters are the best," Zapolski said.

In addition to fresh oysters, three chefs from Boston were on hand to serve their special oyster recipes. Hungry guests were piling their plates with oysters in chipotle butter faster than chef Greg Reeves could grill them.

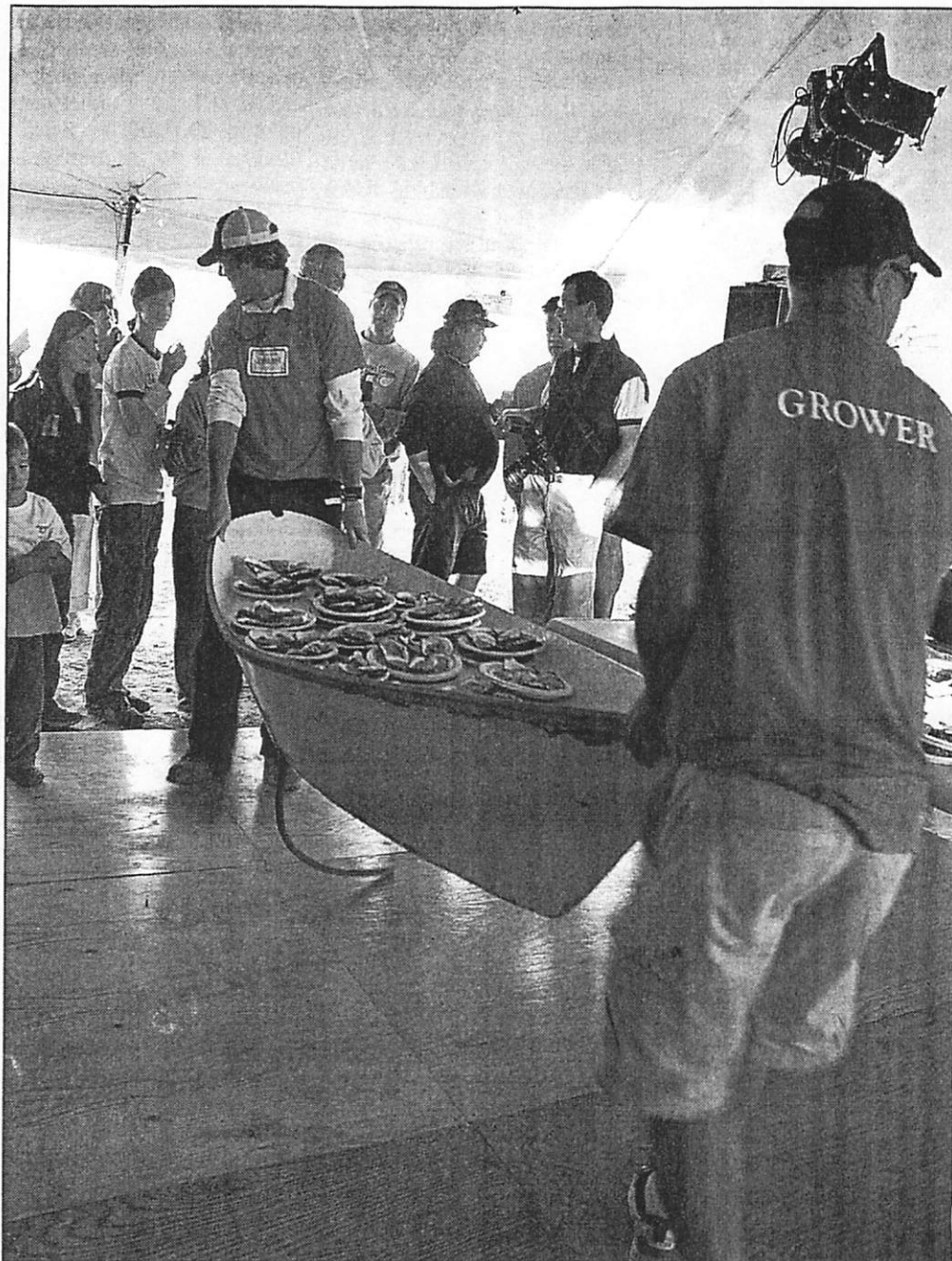
Reeves, executive chef at Green Street in Cambridge, said there are different things that make certain oysters taste better than others, and Duxbury waters seem to grow some of the best.

"This is a beautiful setting, and there's something about these oysters, whether it's the brininess, or the consistency, the water here just seems to produce great oysters," Reeves said.

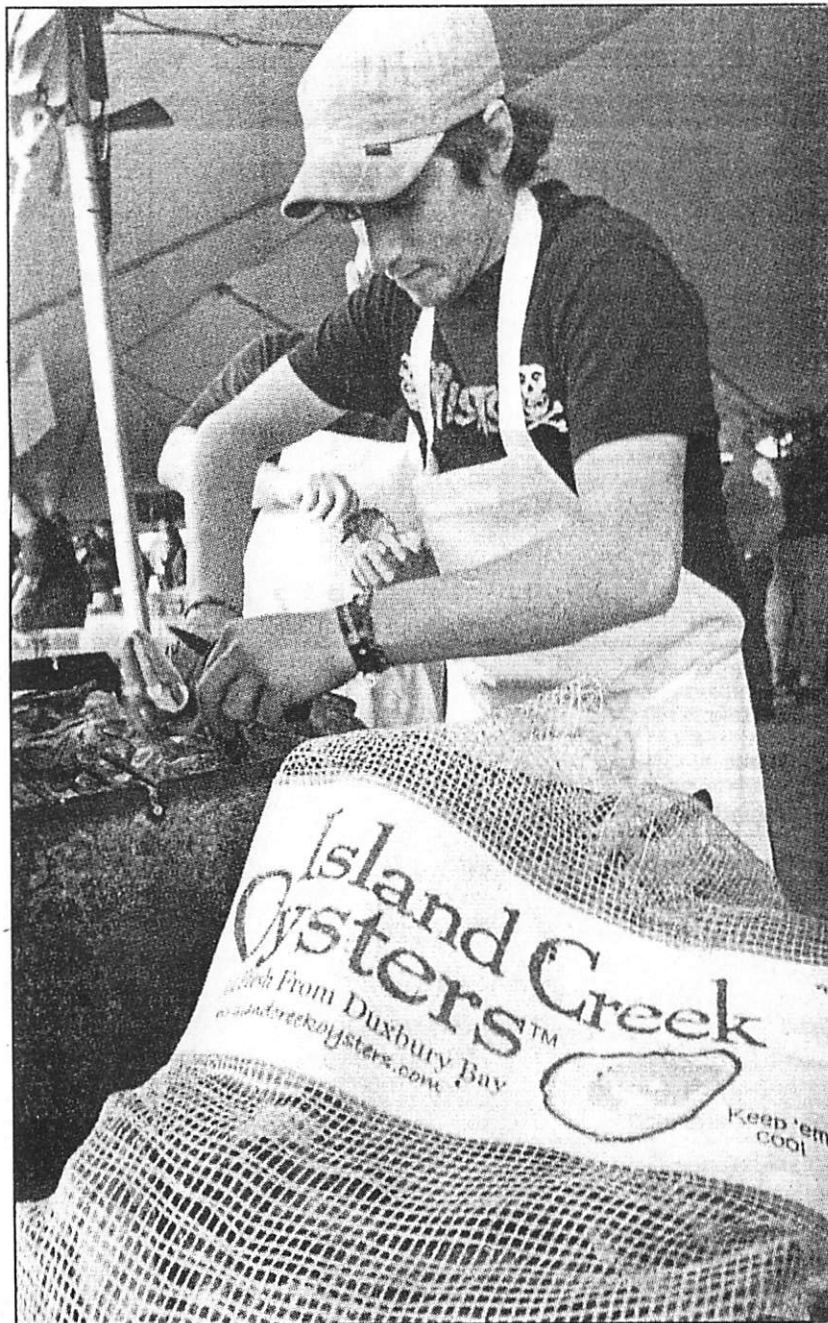
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*Photos by
Laura Sinclair*

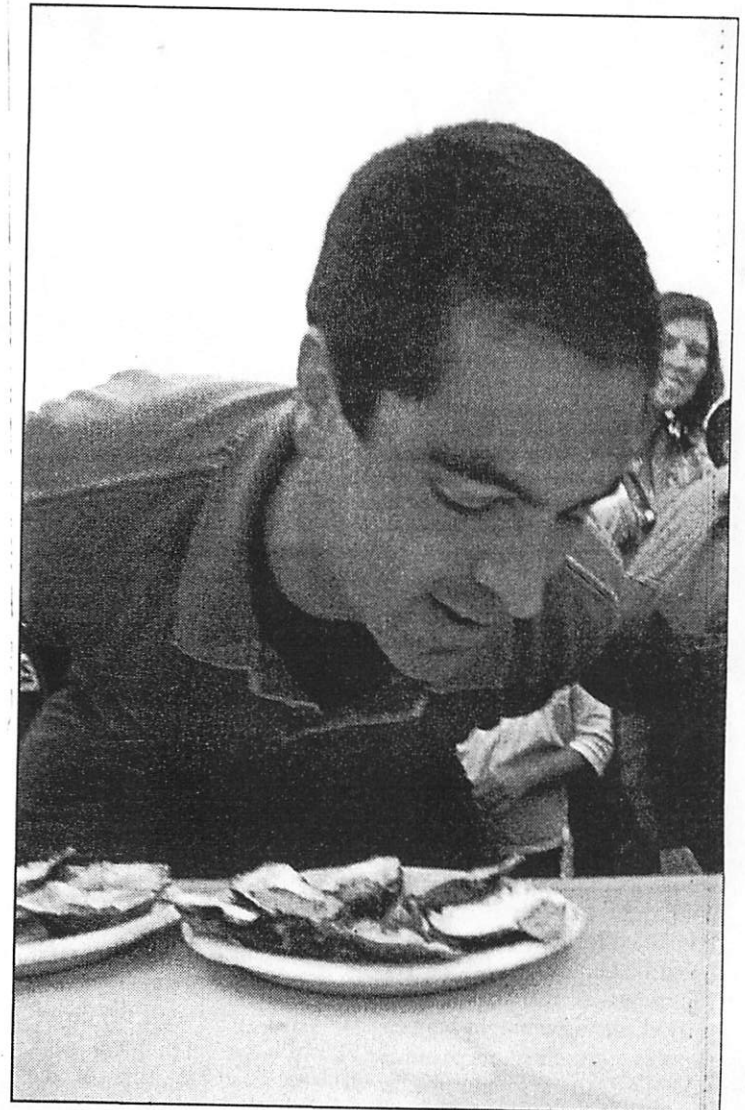


Workers deliver a boatload of oysters into the festival.



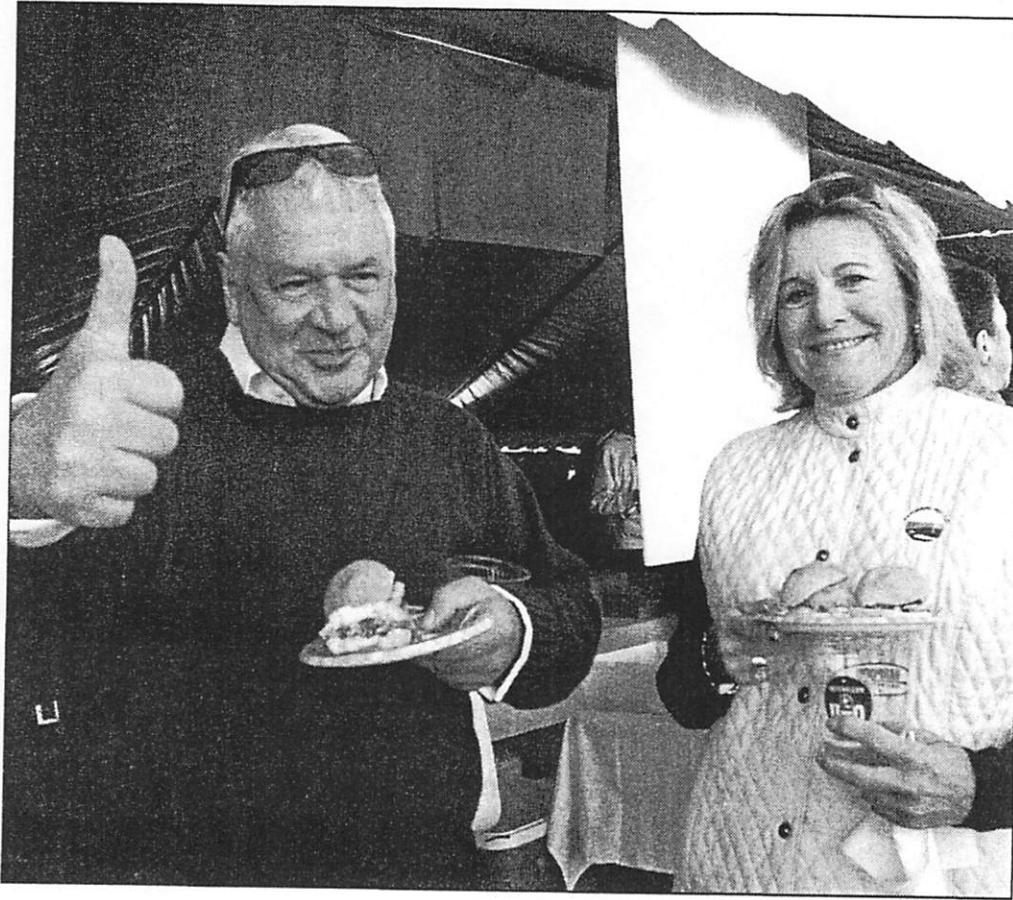
Noah Elsass shucks oysters as fast as he can.

PHOTO/LAURA SINCLAIR



John Phaneuf of Plymouth wins the first heat of the oyster-eating contest.

Nicola Zanghi of Connecticut, attending with his friend Francesca, gives a thumbs-up to his oyster sandwich.





Rob and Laura Ciampa of Andover enjoy a fried oyster sandwich with arugula and Dijon mustard during the Island Creek Oyster Festival.